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ABSTRACT

The "rural school problem" continues to plague current researchers, as it did school reformers of the past. There are basically two academic literatures focusing upon rural communities and their schools where rurality rather than ethnicity is the focus. The historical literature typically features tales of rural economic decline, changing demography, and emerging industrial culture from the Civil War through the Cold War. The second perspective also deals with major social transformations in economy, location, and occupation, but deals with the international scene rather than the domestic. Both perspectives address the role of formal schooling in transforming rural populations into modern citizens. Braxton County, West Virginia, fits the rural community types of "depressed rural" and "isolated rural." Sociologists hypothesize about the potential for rural schools to bridge the alleged chasm between rural Appalachia and the national culture. Observations in Braxton County schools suggest that instructional and extracurricular activities are intentionally compensatory, designed to offset some of the perceived cultural disadvantages of regional rurality, isolation, and poverty. However, cultural opposition to mainstream educational goals arises from a strong sense of place, the hunting subculture, the lack of role models seeking career goals, fatalist and fundamentalist beliefs, and the low value placed on high school and higher education. (Contains 25 references.) (KS)

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RESEARCHING RURAL AMERICAN SCHOOLS: CONTINUING CULTURAL THEMES AND CULTURAL CONFLICTS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

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ABSTRACT

Formal education in rural places has perplexed the imagination of school builders and school reformers ever since the industrial revolution. As as in decades past, American rural educators believe exposure to the national culture is critical, and they attempt to provide bridges for their students from isolated and depressed rural communities into it. Meanwhile, efforts continue at state and national levels to alter the organization of rural schools and their intended outcomes. Such dynamics and forces provide a rich field for ethnographic study, but a field rarely entered by qualitative researchers where minority populations are not involved. In the following essay I briefly review historical and international perspectives upon rural school contexts and issues, concentrating next upon the current economic and demographic factors relating to rural school practice. I conclude by illustrating contemporary rural schooling dynamics and issues in one central Appalachian school system which has been the subject of my research for several years.

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From the domain of cultural anthropology, rural public schools can be intriguing places to visit and study - and for many of the same sorts of reasons which historically made them targets of ridicule and reform by educational professionals seeking to build their secular and scientific professions throughout this century. In many rural schools, for instance, norms and values in opposition to industrial (and now post-industrial) society can still be recognized and studied. Small schools can still be found, for example, which serve only handfuls of families; where teachers and students often know each other intimately through formal and informal networks outside of the school; where the separation of church and state is sometimes still openly contested; where expectations for the utility of a high school (rather than college) education sometimes persist; and where tradition is still important, for generations of the same families may have attended the same school.

Contemporary education reform - whatever the decade - has typically challenged the curricula and organization of such places. They were usually portrayed as unsystematic, unscientific and inefficient (Tyack, 1974; Katz, 1971). Fortunately, professional educators believed, the "rural school problem" would be mostly be "solved" without intervention, as rural Americans would continue to abandon the countryside in search of the modern metropolis (Cubberley, 1918). For those places too stubborn to die, state departments of education often took up the task of eradicating lay-administered, haphazardly attended, poorly taught and voluntarily

maintained rural schools (Tyack, 1974).

Social scientists apparently concluded that the "rural school problem" remained of little consequence by the middle of this century. By the early 1960s, for instance, Talcott Parsons and his students proclaimed the public school as the critical agent in transforming the normative behaviors of American children away from the ascriptive, dependent, particularist and diffuse norms which critics of rural schools at the turn of the century claimed were their organizing features (Parsons, 1959; Dreeben, 1968).

As Alan Peshkin's seminal work reminded us, however, rural schools had not all vanished by this time (Peshkin, 1978; 1982). On the other hand, except for Peshkin's work and those of a few mid-century community sociologists (e.g., Holingshead, 1975; West, 1948), significant scholarship on rural schools and rural school cultures per se remains amazingly underdeveloped (DeYoung, 1987). Most ethnographically informed research on rural schools and their surrounding communities has dealt primarily with matters of ethnicity as they occur in a small percentage of rural schools in the deep South, the Southeast, and Alaska (e.g., Heath, 1983; Wax. et.al., 1964; Kleinfeld, 1979). Such a state-of-affairs is somewhat disconcerting as over one-fifth of all American schools are still rural, approximately 12% of children in the U.S. attend educational institutions in the countryside, and most of these schools and school districts are primarily populated by anglo-protestant students rather than those enrolling minority students (Elder, 1992).

Literatures Focusing on Rural Issues and Rural Schooling

There are basically two academic literatures focusing upon rural communities and their schools where rurality rather than (or in addition to) ethnicity is the focus. One of these is historical, and deals with the American Common School and High School movements. Such work typically features tales of rural economic decline, changing demography, and emerging cultures of industrial work in the U.S. from the civil war through the cold war (Theobald, 1991). The second perspective also deals with major social transformations in economy, location and occupation, but deals with the international scene rather than the domestic (e.g., Simmons, 1980). In both sets of literatures, changing notions of educational means and ends figure prominently.

Domestic Historical Vignettes

Virtually every school in the United States was a rural one prior to the industrial revolution. While typically no states had mandatory school attendance laws, many communities provided some sort of educational opportunities for local children, and most children attended schools for some portion of the year in this era. We have stereotypical notions of many such places, of course. They were those small one-room frame structures out on the prairie or in the woods built upon less desireable farm land, where "scholars" undifferentiated by age frequented the schoolhouse as directed by parents who may or may not have had a great love of schooling.

Teachers in such structures were likewise an unpredictable lot. Some were itinerant surveyors or disabled veterans without

property or prospects. Others were the daughters of local trustees who had not yet married, or perhaps did not want to. In addition to having "unprofessional" (or more accurately, pre-professional) teachers, such places were usually lay controlled; depended heavily upon local subscription to operate; were often on the brink of closure for lack of funds or a teacher; were difficult for many children to walk to; and usually had little or no equipment or books (Manke, 1994; Theobald, 1995; Link, 1986). By the 1870s, educational patterns began to shift dramatically. Industrial development and attendant immigration form rural areas and overseas swelled north American cities to the point where formal institutions became a primary focus of American civic and cultural leaders (Katz, 1971; Tyack, 1974). As the "social problem" of crime led to police departments and the "social problem" of refuse led to sanitation departments, the "social problem" of ostensibly unruly and "normless" city children led urban reformers to create education departments and compulsory schooling (Perkinson, 1993).

Rural schools, the experts said, could not provide the educational model for dealing with city children. Immigrants without north American cultural or political experience who were likely non-English speakers and without the training perceived necessary for an emerging industrial order required a new educational institution. Americans migrating from the countryside into the city for perceived employment opportunities, too, were deemed to require a different institutional setting than they had seen in rural America. As the objectives and

procedures of urban public schooling evolved, its tasks not only encompassed the reinforcement of teachings in protestant values and English instruction with which many were already well versed, but increasingly and intentionally hoped to transform second, third, and forth generation American rural residents into city-livers, industrial workers and consumers (Cremin, 1975; Tyack, 1974).

Historians of American education describe the socialization intended by school reformers very clearly and in cultural terms. In the city, they argue, norms of extended families engaged in household economies directed by family heads were of diminishing value. Rather, industrial work habits demanded attention to time and workplace efficiency; careers within growing mercantile and bureaucratic organizations; workplace operations clearly divided by specialized labor; the exclusion of distracting kin from the shop floor (particularly after the extablishment of child labor laws); new systems of authority based upon norms of expertise and efficiency rather than of the family, clan or tradition; etc.

The Internationalist Perspective

In the 1960s, modern and modernizing nations were experiencing a "human capital revolution," according to educational economists (e.g., Schultz, 1981; Bowman 1966). According to them, rural populations were becoming trained (and needed such training) to contribute to national development efforts worldwide. Rather than education as a "consumer" good, formal schooling undertaken to increase vocational and

intellectual skills was functional to the enhancement and growth of national economies: i.e; they had productive utility.

Human capital development programs, as articulated and implemented under such international development agencies as the World Bank, had a tremendous effect upon educational policy and practice in many developing countries (Psacharopoulas, 1986; Simmons, 1980). Unlike the American case, where existing schools were continuously "reformed" and "restructured," grants and loans for educational investments abroad typically went into new formal educational structures and into "non-formal" education programs. While the control of public schools in the U.S. thus remained primarily controlled by local and state officials, in countries relying upon development grants for "improving" schooling typically led to new and/or reformed national schooling policies and agencies.

Also clearly in the Western tradition of emphasizing the individual (rather than the community) as the focus of change, modernization theories posited that in addition to the technical skills (i.e., human capital) required for industrial development, a particular set of values, motives, norms and attitudes were essential to the character structure of individuals upon whom the establishment and/or maintenance of a modern technological society would depend (Apter, 1987). Modernity theorists clearly identified formal schooling as an essential site for the promulgation of both modern values and technical skills in advance of structural changes in local economies (Inkeles and

Smith, 1974; Fuller, 1991).

Inkeles and Smith, for example, argued that "modern" individuals are (among other things): open to new experiences, accepting and ready for social change, able to reflect on issues and form independent judgments, interested in acquiring information and fact, oriented toward the future as opposed to the past; have a sense of mastery over the environment, believe in the value of future planning, have an appreciation of technical skills, and have high educational and occupational aspirations. More traditional individuals (and the cultures in which they live) are less interested in new experiences; uninterested in social change; more likely to form and hold opinions based on the beliefs held by others in the tribe and or kinship systems; uninterested in acquiring knowledge for its own sake; value the past more than the future; are more fatalistic than optimistic regarding the human ability to control future events; place less value on occupational specialization and competence; and have low educational and occupational aspirations (e.g., Inkeles and Smith, 1974; Inkeles and Holsinger, 1974).

The conventional wisdom today in the U.S. and around the world equates expanded investments in schooling to be related to the strength of local economies, and the provision and reform of formal schooling for such ends continues at a feverish pace (DeYoung, 1989). Boli and Ramirez argue that formal schooling internationally is specifically targeted at altering rural (traditional or pre-modern) individuals' previous identification

with and dependence upon sub-national social groups (families, clans and tribes) for social and economic success. As national governments become increasingly important in the creation and protection of industries and jobs, educational "opportunities" increasingly become mandates for children to become citizens with values and skills required for entry into national, not local labor markets. Households, clans and communities can no longer provide meaninglful adult work, which national goverments at least promise. The tradeoff is that occupational entry is via formal schooling, whose intent is to socialize future citizens into national economies.

Whether accurate or not, human capital and modernity perspectives deal centrally with concepts of culture and the role of formal schooling in transforming rural populations into modern citizens, with all the conceptual difficulty "modernity" implies. And, their descriptions and proscriptions for creating modern schools in the late twentieth century abroad sound much like those of rural school reformers heard historically in the U.S. Both at home and abroad, the organizational forms and curricular practices of public schools are to demonstrate to children that the importance of place and of kinship are secondary to adult success, where they once were primary. Children are taught to think in terms of occupational and profesional careers which their education is instrumental for, and are taught that school credentials and degrees are the primary legitimate way for them to enter into the world of work. And, in an increasingly secular

world, they are taught that their success in the world of world will determine virtually every other social and material aspect of their lives. Sounding like Talcot Parsons some four decades later, Boli and Ramirez conclude:

> The ideology supporting mass education (emphasizes) certain social utilities. Education provides a better work force to further economic development. ... Education creates good citizens; it makes people loyal members of the national polity. ... It creates a happier, more satisfied population, both as an end in itself, and for social and political stability. ... In short, education derives its legitimacy from its purported importance for reaching virtually all the goals of modern society (1986. p 18).

Contemporary Rural Typologies

There are no schools in rural America which remain as those described in the historical record, for the social and educational changes in our culture have been too profound. Industrial and information-age economies have undercut and transformed rural economies so that local communities today are very different from those which once launched and nurtured rural schools; and state national governments today dictate most educational leadership and curriculur policy. In the U.S., for example, most late twentieth century rural schools operate in non-agricultural contexts. The U.S. Department of Agriculture classifies America's 2,443 nonmetro counties according to eight primary types of economic activities: farming, mining, manufacturing, retirement, government services, federal lands, persistent poverty, and "unclassified." Of these 2,443 counties, only 702, or 29%, are farm dependent; 242, or 10% are "persistent

poverty" counties (i.e, they essentially have no local economic base), and 515, or or 22% have local economies based primarily upon retirement income (Bender et al., 1985). Thus, most of rural is non-agricultural, many residents are poor; and the contexts and subcultures of many rural places are thus heavily influenced by demographic and economic factors very different from either nineteenth century America or contemporary metropolitan America.

While acknowledging the tremendous differences between rural schools, Tom Gjelten nevertheless classified five different rural community types in the U.S. based primarily upon economy and demography (1982). He further suggests that school cultures in each community type are significantly different; and that several of the five community types have social dynamics and norms partially approximating rural community and school dynamics of an earlier era. Two of these five little resemble the rural places about which this essay is written, but which may have extremely interesting cultural dynamics (e.g., Reck, 1985). These are "high growth" rural places - in the midst of economic expansion and/or very near expanding metropolitan areas, and "reborn" rural communities - inundated by city "refugees" attempting to escape urban congestion, crime, etc.

The other three types of rural communities and schools, however, may often contain significant numbers of children and young adults whose economic and cultural situations more closely approximate those of rural Americas who did not migrate toward

urban centers during the past hundred years. "Stable rural" communities include stereotypical rural places often still involved with agriculture, although their numbers continue to dwindle. "Depressed rural" - where the local economy is underdeveloped and outmigration is high, and "isolated rural" - those typically far removed from the transportation and commerce centers of the nation - are his two other types. Often in both depressed and isolated communities the social and/or cultural differences/disadvantages experienced by children become focal points for school programming (e.g., DeYoung, 1994).

Isolated and Depressed Communities in Appalachia

My own rural school fieldwork during the past several years has occurred in and around Braxton County, West Virginia. While isolation and economic depression are obviously relative terms, both of these adjectives have been used to describe most of central West Virginia for decades. Isolated by several different mountain ranges and dependent upon subsistance and barter economies, pioneers on the Appalachian frontier developed a social organization of production by the mid nineteenth century which depended upon a strong kinship system and small community stability (Eller, 1982). Most of the region had no plantation economy, and thus the racial and tenant farming crises of the deep South were of little consequence in the highlands. As well, commercial farming and later agri-business was little possible in the mountains without the large expanses of flat land, which led to different and earlier patterns of agricultural decline than in

the Mid and Far West (Billings, 1988).

Mountain isolation enabled the refinement and persistance of a regionally distinct subculture into the twentieth century. At this point, Appalachia was virtually "rediscovered" when extractive industries became critical to the industrial Northeast. During this era a cash economy developed based upon extractive and exploitive boom-and-bust industries linked to later environmental and social degradation (Eller, 1982; Gaventa, 1980). The poverty and unemployment associated with isolation and lack of economic possibilities rediscovered (again) in the 1960s led to the creation of several national development programs (like the Appalachian Regional Commission) to help "modernize" the mountaineer: mountaineers who were frequently charged as having the non-instrumental values and norms responsible for regional underdevelopment (Whisnant, 1980).

Regional scholars who today utilize the concept of "Appalachian" to discuss regional people and communities continue to suggest a number of key value differences between Appalachia and the rest of the nation (Ergood, 1991; Shapiro, 1983). There is important disagreement, however, about which ones are most important; about which may be regional or rather variations upon those more generic to all rural peoples; and about the extent to which "traditional" values have been adversely affected by the internal-colony status of central Appalachia and its resulting sub-cultures of poverty (Lewis et. al., 1978). Ergood summarized and ranked over twenty scholarly efforts to distill "Appalachian

otherness" perspectives in 1991. According to his review:

> we find the mountain people described as independent, kin-involved people whose lives are closely bound to their physical environment, whose activities are traditional, and whose beliefs are both fatalistic and religiously fundamentalist. This description has slowly emerged and expanded from the earliest attempts by social scientists to the most recent (p. 47).

The Appalachian School as an Occupational and Cultural "Bridge"

There remains serious intellectual discussion about the centrality of individual values and value structures as focal points for understanding or "improving" regional people. However, there is little disagreement among anyone who has observed in Appalachian schools - particularly those in its most isolated and/or economically depressed areas - about the explicit practices in effect there designed to transmit "modern" and instrumental values among mountain children.

Rural sociologists Schwarzeller and Brown authored the most benign theoretical perspective related to mountain schooling and its hypothetical potential for bridging the alleged chasm between rural Appalachia and the national culture (1960). They argued that the kinship, political and economic systems of the region continued to instill character traits among Appalachia's youth which were inappropriate for their integration into the increasingly available outside world even into the 1960s. They applauded the expansion of federal school aid and greater state pressures on local schools to teach modern subjects, believing such policies could help mountain schools become the "cultural

bridge" from an agrarian/kinship centered Appalachian subculture into the national industrial society. As they rightly understood, public schools were local outposts of the national culture embedded in local communities.

The Case of Braxton County

Communities and schools in Braxton County are intriguing places to read about or to study. Historical voices of teachers and parents regarding the educational needs of rural and isolated places within the county are easy to find, as are contemporary schooling dynamics dedicated to creating national citizens and a national work force. The case of Braxton County, in other words, provides a window both upon rurality and schooling in the past tense, as well as in the present and future sense.

I have been witness to such forces over a several year span, employing a variety of qualitative methods: participant observation, document analysis, oral histories and unstructured interviews with dozens of key informants (e.g., DeYoung, 1991; 1994). Topics of the research have differed slightly during this period, but key differences between the contexts of rural schools in Braxton and those of metropolitan America even today remain in view.

Braxton County's economic history was and remains clearly part of the larger economic circumstances of Appalachia, although several important economic and cultural differences undo various stereotypes and affect school-community dynamics in interesting ways. Hillside farming along creeks and hollows in Braxton

throughout the nineteenth century gave way by the early twentieth century to timbering, coal mining and gas and oil drilling activities. And, as resources in the county were extracted and harvested (sometimes by absent owners), local economies began to wither, and people began to move away. Braxton had a population of 23,973 in 1920; but only 12,666 in 1970.

By mid-twentieth century standards, Braxton was considered isolated, and by Gjelton's 1982 standards, both depressed and isolated. Like all typologies, though, such categories can be misleading upon closer inspection. For instance, there were small but important professional and skilled working class families in Braxton during the early twentieth century, for the county had two navigable rivers and later a thriving railroad industry which enabled moderate commercial and manufacturing industries to develop alongside those involved with extraction until at lest the 1930s. Town boosters In booming Gassaway, Sutton and Burnsville would likely have described their neighbors in outlying areas as isolated, but not themselves. And, residents of these towns continued to struggle for their small-town way of life and the promises of America at least until the 1960s, when Presidents Kennedy and Johnson came into Kentucky and West Virginia to tell them as Appalachians that they were chronically depressed and needed federal help.

Rural Schooling for a National Culture

Much of what I observed in several of Braxton's eight public schools I worked in between 1988 and 1993 was

intentionally "cultural." That is, teachers and administrators carried-out instructional and extra-curricular activities explained and understood as intentionally compensatory: i.e., designed to offset some of the cultural disadvantage of regional rurality, isolation and/or poverty. My most recent work focused upon the (second) consolidating of a former town 1-12 school in Burnsville, West Virginia. Compensating for the perceived social and cultural disadvantage of students from further out in the county was well recognized as a primary concern of the school, as it had been historically. Significantly, the line between official school practices and extra-school compensatory involvement was very weak at Burnsville. Teachers and the principal there were involved heavily in the after and before-school activities of many children, particularly the ones considered most "at-risk." The principal was a church elder, taught Sunday School, and was involved in both Boy and Cub Scouts. He used his position as school principal to inform and entice prospective members into each of these organizations for children he deemed needed positive influences not available in their homes. And, as a school teacher and principal at the school for over twenty years, he argued that he new well almost every family of the approximately three hundred students in his school.

A popular teacher at Burnsville was also heavily involved in regional Girl Scout activities. One courner of her classroom, in fact, was given over to a huge pile of boxed Girl Scout

cookies during the spring of 1991. Burnsville School in essence served as a distribution point for such cookies, as it did for clothes which the principal distributed to neediest children of the school. As it turns out, Burnsville School was the only K-8 school in the county prior to its 1992 consolidation. Supporters of the school, like teacher JB, believed that the nurturing ability of such a grade arrangement specifically facilitated the social and cultural needs of a school population with many "at-risk" students. When asked to talk about whether her school was a good school, she repled - as did many other teachers - with regard to the compensatory cultural attributes of the institution:

> I (think) it is a good place for kids. I think the teachers are caring, I think this is the only social activity that a lot of these kids get. Since we're so rural, there isn't a lot of places where kids can get together and do things together and school is mainly their social outlet. And I do think it's a good place for kids. We do have activities after school for the kids, you know, the sports activities, the dances for the kids, we have the Brownies and the Girl Scouts and now we're doing Boy Scouts and it is mainly through the school.

Although I was favorably impressed with the compensatory efforts of Burnsville school, at times I also found them ironic. For example, the same sorts of commercial activities I personally found offensive surrounding my own suburban lifestyle; e.g., fast food restaurants and shopping malls, were often the very ones which local teachers in Braxton schools believed their children needed to experience for educational purposes. Field trips for

elementary children in Braxton, for example, sometimes included a trip to the local movie theater (which operated several days a week in the county seat), or to the county roller skating rink.

Sometimes compensatory schooling practices in Braxton were also contradictory, in my judgement. For example, bus trips to away athletic and academic competitions to be a highly prized activity for many middle school children. A central component of each of the trips I went on involved a stop at some fast-food restaurant along the interstate. Such stops invariably enabled students to spend considerable amounts of money upon commercial high-fat foods (cheeseburgers, french-fries, and milk shakes) which of course they are all enticed to do by the national media. So, while Braxton County schools pride themselves in providing only highly nutritious lunches in an effort to improve the diets of lower income students (over 70% of the county's children qualify for free or reduced price lunches), and while the purchase of candy bars and soft drinks is not allowed within the school building, facilitating students to partake of arguably harmful elements of the national nutritional culture is occasionally tolerated or promoted in an effort to compensate for the lack of any national fast-food chains in the Burnsville attendance area.

Dealing with and Combatting "Oppositional Cultures"

Critical educational anthropologists today have coined the phrase "oppositional cultures" to talk about patterned opposition to work and gender roles portrayed in American culture and

provided by the school (Weis, 1990; Willis, 1977). In rural Appalachia (at least), such oppositional cultues have existed for years. Patterns of work and of leisure here remain quite different from those of metropolitan America. For instance, many Braxton County boys have rifles and actively deer hunt in the surrounding woods and fields in the fall of every year. Families also frequently have all-terrain vehicles for venturing far into the woods on a daily basis or sometimes to hunting cabins back in the mountains. Recognizing this fact of life in the school system, hunter safety courses are held in most middle schools and at the high school during the school year. And, the first week of rifle hunting season (around Thanksgiving) is a week of no school in Braxton. Sometimes this week is made up between Christmas and New Year's, but since absences are always high when deer season starts, there is no longer an effort to compel the boys who would skip school anyway (and who are alleged to need to be in school the most) to attend.

Some suggest that the local hunting sub-culture is economically functional, as the deer killed for the most are consumed within the households of hunting families. On the other hand, much of the male image in central West Virginia is associated with gun ownership and hunting: the state motto, for instance, is Montani Semper Liberi or "Mountaineers are always free." There is a historical dimension to these perceived "freedoms," too. When timbering and mining industries operated here in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a

frequent complaint of mill and mine owners was that the men who came to work one day might take off and go hunting or to their homeplace to see their family the next day: i.e., that they had no long-term commitment to the companies for whom they worked. They viewed wage labor as supplemental to hillside farming and hunting, not a replacement (Eller, 1982; Lee, 1968). One early solution to this problem in Appalachia, a solution at least in the eyes of owners, was the construction of company towns where total environments were created for workers, and where only punctual and regular work habits and attendance would guarantee company housing and shopping privledges for workers' families. Today's efforts in this arena obviously involve the schools.

A related problem in the eyes of Braxton educators is that there are many who live here who prefer to live close to the place of their birth, to their families, and to the outdoors if they can find the resources to do so. Some would rather live on government assistance near home than venture into the cities looking for work which is uncertain. Local, state and national education policy is directed at instilling career oriented and professional goals for Braxton children. However, role models in the community who demonstrate the value of persistence and career orientation are not plentiful, for many such models moved away in search of employment in decades past. Meanwhile, those who are either retired and living on fixed incomes and/or would rather work seasonally and spend time in the woods hunting and fishing are easily found.

The principal I introduced above cited an example of this dilemma within his own family. Braxton became an economically depressed area between 1940 and 1960, as the boom years of 1900-1930 faded into memory. In the late 1960s and 1970s, however, dam construction and highway building came briefly into the county. From MM's perspective, this cyclical mini-boom had a mixed long-term blessing: a blessing he thought harmed the teaching of work habits required for a good education and a good career when the predictable bust occurred:

> In the late 1950s and early 1960s (we had) a pretty low key lifestyle. (Then) interstate (and the dam) construction came in here. People were all of a sudden given jobs ... that paid enormous salaries. I mean, people who were used to living on $300 a month were all of a sudden making $300 a week. ... A lot of people were able to deal with it, a lot weren't. They had become used to the opulent lifestyle that these jobs allowed them to have and I can still see many of them doing that, many of them my relatives who had jobs that paid $10-12-14 dollars an hour but now those jobs are no longer available in this area but they still live here and they complain that they'll never take another job unless they can get $10-12-14 dollars an hour. So, some of them (remain) unemployed. ... (Today) the union calls my cousin out for work every spring and he works six or eight weeks and makes good money as a laborer, but then he's laid off for long periods of time and he draws his unemployment. He would be probably a whole lot better off to take a $4.50 - $5.00 a hour job that worked eight hours a day consistently year round and stick with it. He probably could come up with some retirement system for himself. As it is now he'll probably live that way and for the rest of his life until he's ready to retire and when he retires will he have anything? Who knows. I hope he will have but I see a lot of people doing that.

While it is clear that the schools of Braxton County aspire to be bridges to the national culture, teachers here themselves

underscore the importance of place for their students, thus compromising some of their message. On the one hand, many Braxton teachers and staff verbally dedicate themselves to the upward social mobility and personally satisfying careers which out-migrating is supposed to accomp'ish. On the other hand, obtaining a job in the school system has been a decades-long strategy for well connected and/or high achieving students (usually women) to obtain work and stay in the community. Most local teachers have been trained at the nearby teachers college and been able to garner both a career and a stay-at-home job. JB, also quoted earlier, underscored the job possibilities for high school graduates in Braxton County since WWII:

> Well, basically, you either went into college to be a teacher, or you got a job at the pump station, gas station, or with the utility company of some type, or you left. Unless you went into business for yourself. You left, it wasn't here. Where's the industry? Where's the factories? There's nothing here in this community, or this county. So you left. You wanted to work. You had to work. You left. The old farms is gone. ... and you had the option, you left or you got on human services. You know, that's the whole nine yards of the ballgame. I'd say probably half of my graduating class went into teaching or something. They had the idea, "if I'm a teacher, I've got a job. And they was probably right until the last few years. They had a position here in the county, or somewhere close in the county. They didn't have to go to far. Well everybody can't be a teacher or a lawyer, some of us are candlestick-makers, you know. But that's why most of these teachers went into teaching in this area. Security, a little bit of security.

Meanwhile, a county teacher summarized the importance of place and family in her career aspirations. Rather, she summarized why career to her is less important than it may be to

her contemporaries in metropolitan schools elsewhere. I asked her why she stayed in Braxton even though she earned substantially less than the national average for teachers, and she had little job security in a system which continued to downsize. She responded:

> I stay in West Virginia because I choose to. I like West Virginia, I like being near my family. That is very important to me. I have a friend that lives in Florida and is all-the-time saying, "Come down, move down here with me. I have a job for you in the room next door. You can make twice your salary." But, I told her it was too far away from my Mom. That's very important to me. I want my daughters to grow up around their grandparents. I don't want them to be 18 hours away where they get to see their grandparents only twice a year. Family is very important to me. Plus I like the area. I like the rural area. I don't want my kids to live in a big, large city. I don't like the statistics I see coming out of cities. I like the fact that if my kids stay (after school) for a Brownie or Girl Scout meeting that they can walk to their grandmother's without worrying that something is going to happen between the school and the house.

Fundamentalim and Fatalism Versus the School

JB's commitment to place, family and community remain marginally acceptable even in contemporary American culture, for they remain manifestations of a romantic rural past many Americans still say they value. However, regional studies observers in Appalachia also identify "fatalism" as a subcultural theme, particularly among poorer and more isolated communities. Perhaps shared worldwide among peoples living in depressed economies, fatalist interpretations of life emphasize the lack of control individuals have over income, life, illness and death. In Appalachia, fatalism is typically a worldview attached to

religious fundamentalism, and both conflict with the aims of many public school officials to transmit norms of personal efficacy and instrumentality into students.

I found both fundamentalist and fatalist teachings in Braxton County, although they were clearly not mainstream beliefs. Those who preached their messages typically operated out of small independent churches, places which have "boomed and busted" themselves throughout the twentieth century. Passionate appeals to children and adults are audible every Sunday over the radio here, as they are weekly and on Sunday at dozens of county church services. Preachers invariably urge local sinners to be born again, urging them to let go of their earthly pursuits, like wealth and fame. And it takes no formal schooling to be saved, only a personal experience with Jesus and commitment to follow his teachings.

Ironically, the small and usually poor church groups who today assemble to hear such sermons often congregate in former one and two-room schools in the countryside. These places have been abandoned by the school system in previous rounds of school consolidation. Today's school leaders would likely face intense organized opposition save for the fact(s) that the independent churches in the region spend as much time disagreeing with each other over theology as they do with mainline churches and other social groups; and almost every family in the county has one or more members working in some capacity for the school system.

For religious conservatives, the tolerance of perceived

misbehavior in school represents and adds to the decline of morality in the U.S. For example, students with a behavior problems in Braxton today are invariably considered "at-risk" and often culturally disadvantaged by the school. When this occurs, they usually receive special attention in order to keep them from failing and dropping out. For some rural pastors, misbehaving children should not be tolerated to remain in school. A pastor of small independent church which held services in a former two-room Braxton County school was very critical of public education and those in the county who ran the local system. And among his congregation were several dozen Burnsville students who lived in another small community to the west of town. He used the following terms to describe the failings of the national and local public school system:

DS I remember I went to the one-room school and God was part of the curriculum and in the morning you would have prayer and you would have pledge of allegiance to the flag and you know, you reverenced God and the country. And, too, you know, the teachers were somebody that you looked up to as a role model. And you respected them because they were who they were. ... (Today) our school system is (in trouble) because they took prayer out of the schools, bible reading out of the schools, and don't have any rules about anything anymore. ... One of my girls talks about teaching even the small children, fourth graders, and they are so rowdy you can't teach them ... but if you can't make them mind, you can't teach them. ... And I believe (there are) other reasons for he problems we are having in the public schools right now. (There is) the dope situation and they teach pre-marital sex and extra-martial sex in school and it hasn't helped the pregnancy situation one bit - adding wildfire. And it seems the more we try to teach it and talk about it the worst it gets. Our nation is sin crazy.

AD The people, though, that run the Braxton County school system (are) all native Braxton Countians. Why does the school system not teach the things that you think are important, when it is your own people that are in the school system?

DS Well, because the biggest majority aren't in church. The biggest majority of them aren't saved. Some of them are saved but the biggest majority of them are not saved and therefore they and the ones that - you know - run this country (like the news networks) are unsaved. ... (T)hey're ungodly people and the same way in our school system. People running the school systems and different things are not saved. They have gotten away from God. ...

AD You've got a bunch of kids in your congregation that go down to (Burnsville) school. Are you worried about them? Do you worry about what happens to them when they're not here?

DS Yeah. I do worry about that they're taught and this, that and the other. That's why we try to instill in them while we've got them here so that when they do go out, you know, that they can sort out what's right and what is wrong. Because they're being taught some things wrong.

(More) Work and Gender Issues

Historically there has been a resistance by working class and rural peoples to intellectual aspects of higher education and to secondary school curricula which prepares adolescents for the university (e.g., Curtis, 1988). It wasn't until vocational and agricultural education became part of the American High School movement in the 1920s and 1930s, under sponsorship of the federal government, that high schools became universally acceptable in rural America (Kliebard, 1986). In contemporary West Virginia - one of the only U.S. states projected to continue losing population this decade - future job growth is forecast primarily in health care, correctional institutions and low wage service

industries. During the past several years there have continued to be stronger and stronger calls for greater access to post-high school education of a technical and service nature by residents of rural counties, and virtual scorn in such places toward the state's major academic graduate institutions.

The battle over the importance of a high school education in Braxton in years past is clear in minutes of the county school board. Here, bond proposals for improving vocational offerings and facilities at the three town high schools were supported by those in each community during the 1950s, but rejected by typically poorer citizens in more rural precincts. As the three high schools fell into further and further inadequacy without additional funding, they were consolidated in 1969. By this time, even parents in more rural parts of Braxton County had apparently given up the notion that an eighth-grade education would be acceptable in the future. Even so, appeals to county rather than community pride were involved as part of the consolidation vote. Parents were encouraged to envision how a combined high school athletic program would make Braxton competitive with neighboring counties in football and basketball, since dwindling enrollments had seriously weakened the three seperate high school programs. This appeal probably played a big factor in the positive vote for consolidation.

Today, high school curricular opportunities continue to be viewed with some suspicion by rural parents with less formal schooling themselves who hold jobs which didn't require advanced

academic instruction. The county vocational director painted an interesting cultural view of the high school as it relates to the nature of work and gender, below. Meanwhile, the state department of education and the county central office have put into place new strategies designed to encourage high school students toward post-high school opportunities. Even so, the vocational director had this to say in 1991:

AD: (The county superintendent) once told me that over 90% of the kids in the high school took vocational classes.

RM: Oh, yeah. I, may have told you that. They almost all do. Now, however, that's not as noble as it sounds. That's because sometimes there is nothing else to fill out their schedule. ... But to have a saleable skill is a value to most of our families here. That's a value. For example, here in vocational section we have almost no problems with parents. None. They love what we do, because that fits their norm. A boy is learning carpentry. He's learning to weld. Now, understand that I said, "a boy". If you walk up and down the hall you don't see too many girls in our classes. We do our best. We have a few, few boys in home ec(onomics). and we have an occasional tough girl that takes welding or something. So our parents are very - they can relate to what we're doing. We're teaching skills. And they like that. And they love to see their daughters going through our secretarial branch. That all fits very well. So we have almost no parental problems whatsoever to worry with. Where in academia they just have problem after problem. Because of the parents.

AD: In the academic wing (of the high school)?

RW: Right. In the academic wing. Because it's much more difficult for their parents to relate to the need for academic skills as far as there is to earn a living, because most of them don't have them either. We have sort of a trap in this area geographically. Because I have so many young ladies and young married people and young adults up in these hollows that have great skills as far as working I.B.M. typewriters and word processors and those types of things. But for what? Where are they going to go. You can't go to Charleston or Clarksburg for minimum wage. What are you going to

do? Then, plus the fact that most Appalachians are not mobile anyway. They want to live here. They want to stay here. There is sort of a security in the mountains.

Although not disagreeing with the facts cited by the vocational director, the county school superintendent took issue with portions of his interpretation, and held out hopes that his schools will continue to facilitate Braxton students to "get above their raisin'" as he did. KS, for example, has a very different view of the centrality of women in the county than does RW. In his opinion, women may have lesser official status, but they are more important to community stability and progress than the vocational director believes. And progress is important to him:

KS you see, I view (gender differences) probably differently than he does. You mention in (an earlier paper) about the girls who graduate or who go to school in this county doing better and I've told you that and they do, but you see, the reason I think they do better is not what (RW) said. The reason that they do better in my mind is that this is an Appalachian culture where women are placed in positions of authority and responsibility more so than men are. I wonder who manages the family budgets. I wonder who does the shopping for the family. I wonder who makes the family decisions. ... I know who calls me at my office about a problem. It's the women. And I know who can solve the problems in that family. ... (Women) manage the family and the value structure; file the complaints; (and) solve the problems.

KS traces his local lineage back to the late nineteenth century, the great grandson of tenant farmers, grandson of a miner critically disabled in a roof-fall, and son of railroad engineer who lost his job when the railroad industry went bust in

Braxton. The school superintendent remembered his rural schooling experiences as inferior, and credits his father's urging to obtain "an inside job" along with the nurturing of a caring vocational teacher for enabling him to finish high school and go off to college. He views with disdain romanticized notions of rural schools and Appalachian values, which he equates with dependence and fatalism. In his view, too, allowing rural students to drop out or be satisfied with only vocational instruction if they could do more is a mistake. He reads the national journals and believes that there are serious educational implications of the "information age" for Braxton students.

His efforts to take advantage of a major state initiative to consolidate three county middle schools into one new facility was the primary focus of the work which brought me back to Braxton County between 1990 and 1992. He wasn't the initiator of statewide consolidation, and he required the active support of professional groups and the remaining middle class in the county to make it happen there. Yet, he had a well articulated rationale for why he believed it necessary, and used it to counter insightful objections launched by community members of the affected schools. When I shared Schwarzeller and Brown's cultural bridge metaphor for education in the region, he knew exactly what I was talking about. Around the same time, he shared with me his philosophy of education, particularly as it related to what he perceived to be misguided notions of Appalachian ethnicity - which to him had become equated with a

subculture of poverty. KS, in my interpretation, managed to bridge cultures very well himself. In 1993 he was voted not only Braxton County Citizen of the Year by those in his rural county, but also superintendent of the year by his professional peers. KS had this to say about the aims of formal schooling:

> A school system must always try to lift hopes and dreams and raise the level of expectation of persons who are in a non-productive mode and content with the present. Schools provide the path to new horizons and new ways of viewing (ones) surroundings. Appalachians are prone to accept their circumstances as inevitable and think they have no control over events and the future. Such a fatalistic attitude pervades many communities and families and creates dysfunctional units in modern society. ... Education is the catalyst or the empowering elixir that allows options to be available to the "good old boy" that can free him of caretakers and transfer payments.

Culture, Economy, Citizenship and Schooling

I have attempted in this essay to suggest the varied cultural themes and issues involved with schooling in many contemporary rural communities, particularly those yet removed from major economic and demographic transformations of the larger culture. Schools in rural places like Braxton are interesting and exciting places for ethnographic study, as they frequently operate within a contested terrain where their efforts and contradictions often stand forth in full relief. Naturally, few of the observations and interpretation I have sketched here can stand on their own. Interested readers may want to turn to works of mine where more detail is provided (DeYoung, 1991; 1994). Others may want to seek-out rural cites to pursue important educational questions of their own. I can assure them that the

classrooms and corridors of most such places have rarely seen the likes of university trained field researchers.

In my most recent monograph, both the meaning of schooling as well as how it was to be operationalized were hotly contested. A good portion of this dispute can be interpreted from the following two quotes. The first is from a citizen of Burnsville who spoke publically in opposition to the middle school consolidation in 1992. Unfortunately for residents of that town, there were few other voices as articulate close by to defend the old school. YE proclaimed at a special informational session at Burnsville:

> The following reasons are why we are opposed to change: Three schools are more convenient than one. (Each) is now located in (a) major population center. ... The majority of the working parents and their children live there. Schools help develop the economic baseline for small towns. They (also) serve as gathering places for social activities such as football, girls and boys basketball, baseball - both little league and T-ball - school dances, PTA functions, and many other events. We feel safe and secure in our present environment and we believe that our children are getting a quality education. Parent support for our school system is at an all time high for elementary and middle schools in Braxton County. Asking or suggesting that the citizens of our county abandon our schools is very difficult for us to understand for the reasons that I have given. We are not attached to the school buildings, rather we are concerned for our children, their teachers and the way of life that the present schools provide. ...

KS, on the other hand, believed that under the best of conditions rural schools had been marginal in Braxton. And, after generations of out-migration, dwindling resources and local poverty, the best strategy for improving the educational and

occupational futures of middle school students who had inherited the former old high schools was to consolidate them into a new facility as well. As a representative of the state, and as one concerned about the futures of those he believed would end up requiring public assistance unless public schools provided the occupational and citizenship skills necessary to become productive Americans, he had few qualms about school consolidation. And he thought the school which needed consolidation the most was in fact where resistance was the greatest. This final quote provides a compelling conceptual link between the histories of our own rural schools and the issues and dilemas faced internationally today. Local issues may be different: the larger ones less so. According to KS:

> Burnsville had the most to gain (from consolidation) because there weren't sufficient students there to have a good educational program. There weren't enough kids there to support a good ball team that the community wanted. Then there was probably, as I described earlier, an opportunity for the emergence of some groups that caused kids to develop attitudes to drop out of school. They are probably more prevalent in that school and it was an opportunity to overcome that. The public doesn't think about those issues but that was present. So we're hoping that we've done more for Burnsville's kids. I'm not saying that we helped stimulate their community and that sort of thing but that's not our mission anyway. Our mission is to deal with the kids and get them through high school and give them a good education. And if they want to stay here, fine, and if they want to go somewhere else that's OK too. But we can't concern ourselves with keeping the school in a community for the sake of the adults.

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